

By Veronica K. Meury

Expanding Horizons: Helping Students Redefine Educational and Career Opportunities

POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION, OF NEARLY ANY KIND, CAN BE AN INVESTMENT WORTH MAKING, AS LONG AS THE INVESTMENT FITS THE STUDENT.



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TEACHERS, COUNSELORS AND SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS PLAY A HUGE ROLE IN HELPING STUDENTS

and their families select the right college and career path. Guiding future graduates who aren't interested in a traditional college education is an especially important undertaking. For many parents, having children opt out of college is a devastating blow that can make them feel that they have flunked their final exam in parenting. Educators have an important responsibility to assure these parents that there are other avenues to a fulfilling, relevant and successful career.

Of the nearly 3 million Americans who graduated from high school between October 2006 and October 2007, nearly one-third—or one million—did not go on to college that fall, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Studies show that there are a variety of reasons these remaining graduates do not enter college after high school, ranging from insufficient availability and understanding of financial aid to reluctance to accumulate debt from college loans to concern about missed earning opportunities if they don't immediately enter the workforce. But we know that postsecondary education, of nearly any kind, can be an investment worth making, as long as the investment fits the student.

American College Testing (ACT) says that 25 percent of freshmen in an average year never make it through their sophomore year before throwing in the towel. For these students, valuable time and money is squandered, and their future

becomes uncertain. Clearly, postsecondary education is not a one-size-fits-all proposition—rather it's a personal, individual investment, and students need guidance to make decisions that fit. Educators and administrators have a great opportunity to help high school students and their families become better informed about their options, the costs, and future earning potential so that they can make smart education choices. Advisers should encourage parents and students to think as broadly as possible about the future, and understand that the right education may look nothing like the traditional college experience. Career and technical education offers numerous opportunities for students to embrace a passion while learning the skills to command a rewarding living.

As families consider various options, including technical education, help them answer these common questions:

Isn't a Four-year College Degree Critical for a Successful Career?

A four-year college degree is not necessarily critical for a successful career. While that may be the traditional path for many students, the path to an advanced education should fit with a student's career aspirations, skills and learning style. The U.S. Department of Labor estimates there are more than 50 million jobs that don't require a college degree, but most of these jobs do require skills available from a technical school.

When talking to parents about the future of their son or daughter, numbers can speak volumes. The *Occupational*

Outlook Handbook, published by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, is a resource that can help educators provide statistical reassurance that a technical career has great promise and long-term financial security. For example, the demand for automotive service technicians is expected to increase 14 percent through 2016, compared to 10 percent for all other occupations. More than 110,000 new jobs will be added over the next decade.

Do Technical Schools Offer the Same Kind of Structure and Support that Four-year Colleges are Known for?

The right technical school may require leaving home; this can be more than a little scary for everyone in the family. It is important for parents to feel assured that a technical school will have learning as its central focus. To calm worries, advisers should suggest Web sites for parents to review technical schools offering programs

in their son or daughter's area of interest. Here are a couple recommended Web sites:

www.career.org
www.yourcareercollege.com

Advise parents, if possible, to take a tour of the campus and classrooms with their children to gain a sense of the overall environment as well as the support between the students and the staff. Remind them to also ask about support services to assist students in finding housing, health care or part-time jobs, especially if it is in their child's best interest to relocate.

Will My Child's Learning Style Be Considered?

A technical school should offer programs that evaluate and support the student's learning style so he or she can be successful. Schools like Universal Technical Institute (UTI)—a leading provider

of technical education for individuals seeking careers as professional automotive, diesel, collision repair, motorcycle and marine technicians—accomplishes this through programming designed to improve each student's learning, retention and job performance.

Do Technical Schools Offer Financial Aid?

Technical students are generally eligible for federal Title IV financial aid, but some schools offer additional funds to support technical education. Some schools even have their own charitable foundations. As a 503(c)3 nonprofit, the UTI Foundation provides qualified students with scholarships and grants. Major consideration is placed on students' character references and personal essays expressing their desire to receive a technical education in a particular field. In 2008, the UTI Foundation awarded nearly \$1 million to

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EDUCATORS CAN PLAY A VERY IMPORTANT ROLE IN HELPING PARENTS AND STUDENTS DISCOVER AND FOLLOW THE RIGHT PATH NOW. SMART EDUCATION CHOICES WILL MAKE A SIGNIFICANT IMPACT ON THEIR FUTURE.

students pursuing technical training programs at UTI's 10 campuses nationwide.

In addition to scholarships, some foundations may offer other supportive programs to technical students. For example, the UTI Foundation's Student Emergency Fund provides eligible students with food, toiletries and clothing, as well as grants for such critical expenses as rent, utilities and health care bills.

What Can My Child Expect After Graduation?

Consider the current and future job demands for the technical industry. Job

placement assistance is an important service that all technical schools should offer. Understanding the school's relationship with leading industry manufacturers in the area of focus is important when evaluating the school's placement percentage. Advise parents to ask about the school's alliances with business and industry as well as the placement rate for students in its programs. Key relationships with 25 manufacturers, coupled with jobs skills that are in demand, help UTI place more than 90 percent of its graduates in jobs after graduation.

When trying to select a technical

school, not only should counselors and administrators tell parents to look for high placement numbers, but parents should also factor in advancement opportunities after their child earns a technical degree. Students graduating from a technical program can earn comfortable incomes and good benefits. With the right accreditations and experience, some graduates can command six-figure incomes.

There are many pathways to a student's fulfilling and successful life. Educators can play a very important role in helping parents and students discover and follow the right path now. Smart education choices will make a significant impact on their future. **■**



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